THE TWO ALTARS;

OR,

TWO PICTURES IN ONE.

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I.—THE ALTAR OF LIBERTY, OR 1776.

The well-sweep of the old house on the hill was relieved, dark and clear, against the reddening sky, as the early winter sun was going down in the west. It was a brisk, clear, metallic evening; the long drifts of snow blushed crimson red on their tops, and lay in shades of purple and lilac in the hollows; and the old wintry wind brushed shrewdly along the plain, tingling people's noses, blowing open their cloaks, puffing in the back of their necks, and showing other unmistakable indications that he was getting up steam for a real roystering night.

"Hurra! how it blows!" said little Dick Ward, from the top of the mossy wood-pile.

Now Dick had been sent to said wood-pile, in company with his little sister Grace, to pick up chips, which, everybody knows, was in the olden time considered a wholesome and gracious employment, and the peculiar duty of the rising generation. But said Dick, being a boy, had mounted the wood-pile, and erected there a flag-staff, on which he was busily tying a little red pocket-handkerchief, occasionally exhorting Gracie "to be sure and pick up fast." "O, yes, I will," said Grace; "but you see the chips have got ice on 'em, and make my hands so cold!"

"O! don't stop to suck your thumbs!—who cares for ice? Pick away, I say, while I set up the flag of Liberty."

So Gracie picked away as fast as she could, nothing doubting but that her cold thumbs were in some mysterious sense an offering on the shrine of Liberty; while soon the red handkerchief, duly secured, fluttered and snapped in the brisk evening wind.

"Now you must hurra, Gracie, and throw up your bonnet," said Dicky, as he descended from the pile.

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"But won't it lodge down in some place in the wood-pile?" suggested Gracie, thoughtfully.

"O, never fear; give it to me, and just holler now, Gracie, 'Hurra for Liberty;' and we 'll throw up your bonnet and my cap; and we 'll play, you know, that we were a whole army, and I 'm General Washington."

So Gracie gave up her little red hood, and Dick swung his cap, and up they both went into the air; and the children shouted, and the flag snapped and fluttered, and altogether they had a merry time of it. But then the wind — good-for-nothing, roguish fellow! — made an ungenerous plunge at poor Gracie's little hood, and snipped it up in a twinkling, and whisked it off, off, off, — fluttering and bobbing up and down, quite across a wide, waste, snowy field, and finally lodged it on the top of a tall, strutting rail, that was leaning very independently, quite another way from all the other rails of the fence.

"Now see, do see!" said Gracie; "there goes my bennet! What will Aunt Hitty say?" and Gracie began to cry.

"Don't you cry, Gracie; you offered it up to Liberty, you know —it 's glorious to give up everything for Liberty."

"O! but Aunt Hitty won't think so."

"Well, don't cry, Gracie, you foolish girl! Do you think I can't get it? Now, only play that that great rail was a fort, and your bonnet was a prisoner in it, and see how quick I 'll take the fort, and get it!" and Dick shouldered a stick, and started off.

"What upon 'arth keeps those children so long? I should think they were making chips!" said Aunt Mehetabel; "the fire 's just a-going out under the tea-kettle."

By this time Gracie had lugged her heavy basket to the door, and was stamping the snow off her little feet, which were so numb that she needed to stamp, to be quite sure they were yet there. Aunt Mehetabel's shrewd face was the first that greeted her, as the door opened.

"Gracie — what upon airth! — wipe your nose, child; your hands are frozen. Where alive is Dick, and what 's kept you out all this time, — and where 's your bonnet?"

Poor Gracie, stunned by this cataract of questions, neither wiped her nose nor gave any answer; but sidled up into the warm corner, where grandmamma was knitting, and began quietly rubbing and blowing her fingers, while the tears silently rolled down her cheeks, as the fire made their former ache intolerable.

"Poor little dear!" said grandmamma, taking her hands in hers; "Hitty shan't scold you. Grandma knows you 've been a good girl, — the wind blew poor Gracie's bonnet away;" and grandmamma wiped both eyes and nose, and gave her, moreover, a stalk of dried feunel out of her pocket, whereat Gracie took heart once more.

"Mother always makes fools of Roxy's children," said Mehetabel, puffing zealously under the tea-kettle. "There 's a little maple sugar in that saucer up there, mother, if you will keep giving it to her," she said, still vigorously puffing. "And now, Gracie," she said, when, after a while, the fire seemed in tolerable order, "will you answer my question? — Where is Dick?"

"Gone over in the lot, to get my bonnet."

"How came your bonnet off?" said Aunt Mehetabel. "I tied it on firm enough."

"Dick wanted me to take it off for him, to throw up for Liberty,' said Grace.

"Throw up for fiddlestick! just one of Dick's cut-ups, and you was silly enough to mind him!"

"Why, he put up a flag-staff on the wood-pile, and a flag to Liberty, you know, that papa 's fighting for," said Grace, more confidently, as she saw her quiet, blue-eyed mother, who had silently walked into the room during the conversation.

"Grace's mother smiled, and said, encouragingly, "And what then?"

"Why, he wanted me to throw up my bonnet and he his cap, and shout for Liberty; and then the wind took it and carried it off, and he said I ought not to be sorry if I did lose it, — it was an offering to Liberty."

"And so I did," said Dick, who was standing as straight as a poplar behind the group; "and I heard it in one of father's letters to mother, that we ought to offer up everything on the altar of Liberty! And so I made an altar of the wood-pile."

"Good boy!" said his mother, "always remember everything your father writes. He has offered up everything on the altar of Liberty, true enough; and I hope you, son, will live to do the same."

"Only, if I have the hoods and caps to make," said Aunt Hitty, "I hope he won't offer them up every week — that 's all!"

"O! well, Aunt Hitty, I 've got the hood, — let me alone for that. It blew clear over into the Daddy Ward pasture-lot, and there stuck on the top of the great rail; and I played that the rail was a fort, and besieged it, and took it."

"O! yes, you 're always up to taking forts, and anything else that nobody wants done. I 'll warrant, now, you left Gracie to pick up every blessed one of them chips!"

"Picking up chips is girls' work," said Dick; "and taking forts and defending the country is men's work."

"And pray, Mister Pomp, how long have you been a man?" said Aunt Hitty.

"If I a'nt a man, I soon shall be; my head is 'most up to mother's shoulder, and I can fire off a gun, too. I tried, the other day, when I was up to the store. Mother, I wish you 'd let me clean and load the old gun; so that, if the British should come!"

"Well, if you are so big and grand, just lift me out that table, sir," said Aunt Hitty, "for it 's past supper-time."

Dick sprung, and had the table out in a trice, with an abundant clatter, and put up the leaves with quite an air. His mother, with the silent and gliding motion characteristic of her, quietly took out the table-cloth and spread it, and began to set the cups and saucers in order, and to put on the plates and knives, while Aunt Hitty bustled about the tea.

"I 'll be glad when the war 's over, for one reason," said she. "I 'm pretty much tired of drinking sage-tea, for one, I know."

"Well, Aunt Hitty, how you scolded that pedler, last week, that brought along that real tea."

"To be sure I did. S'pose I 'd be taking any of his old tea, bought of the British? — fling every tea-cup in his face, first!"

"Well, mother," said Dick, "I never exactly understood what it was about the tea, and why the Boston folks threw it all overboard."

"Because there was an unlawful tax laid upon it, that the government had no right to lay. It was n't much in itself; but it was a part of a whole system of oppressive meanness, designed to take away our rights, and make us slaves of a foreign power!"

"Slaves!" said Dicky, straightening himself proudly. "Father a slave!"

"But they would not be slaves! They saw clearly where it would all end, and they would not begin to submit to it in ever so little," said the mother.

"I would n't, if I was they," said Dicky.

"Besides," said his mother, drawing him towards her, "it was n't for themselves alone they did it. This is a great country, and it will be greater and greater: and it 's very important that it should have free and equal laws, because it will by and by be so great. This country, if it is a free one, will be a light of the

world, — a city set on a hill, that cannot be hid; and all the oppressed and distressed from other countries shall come here to enjoy equal rights and freedom. This, dear boy, is why your father and uncles have gone to fight, and why they do stay and fight, though God knows what they suffer, and — " and the large blue eyes of the mother were full of tears; yet a strong, bright beam of pride and exultation shone through those tears.

" Well, well, Roxy, you can always talk, everybody knows," said Aunt Hitty, who had been not the least attentive listener of this little patriotic harangue; " but, you see, the tea is getting cold, and yonder I see the sleigh is at the door, and John 's come, — so let 's set up our chairs for supper."

The chairs were soon set up, when John, the eldest son, a lad of about fifteen, entered with a letter. There was one general exclamation, and stretching out of hands towards it. John threw it into his mother's lap; — the tea-table was forgotten, and the tea-kettle sang unnoticed by the fire, as all hands piled themselves up by mother's chair to hear the news. It was from Captain Ward, then in the American army, at Valley Forge. Mrs. Ward ran it over hastily, and then read it aloud. A few words we may extract: "There is still," it said, " much suffering. I have given away every pair of stockings you sent me, reserving to myself only one; for I will not be one whit better off than the poorest soldier that fights for his country. Poor fellows! it makes my heart ache sometimes to go round among them, and see them with their worn clothes and torn shoes, and often bleeding feet, yet cheerful and hopeful, and every one willing to do his very best. Often the spirit of discouragement comes over them, particularly at night, when, weary, cold and hungry, they turn into their comfortless huts, on the snowy ground. Then sometimes there is a thought of home, and warm fires, and some speak of giving up; but next morning out comes Washington's general orders, — little short note, but it 's wonderful the good it does! and then they all resolve to hold on, come what may. There are commissioners going all through the country to pick up supplies. If they come to you, I need not tell you what to do. I know all that will be in your hearts."

" There, children, you see what your father suffers," said the mother, " and what it costs these poor soldiers to gain our liberty."

" Ephraim Scranton told me that the commissioners had come as far as the Three-mile Tavern, and that he rather 'spected they 'd be

along here to-night," said John, as he was helping round the baked beans to the silent company at the tea-table.

"To-night? — Do tell, now!" said Aunt Hitty. "Then it 's time we were awake and stirring. Let 's see what can be got."

"I 'll send my new over-coat, for one," said John. "That old one an't cut up yet, is it, Aunt Hitty?"

"No," said Aunt Hitty; "I was laying out to cut it over, next Wednesday, when Desire Smith could be here to do the tailoring."

"There 's the south room," said Aunt Hitty, musing; "that bed has the two old Aunt Ward blankets on it, and the great blue quilt, and two comforters. Then mother's and my room, two pair — four comforters — two quilts — the best chamber has got ——"

"O! Aunt Hitty, send all that 's in the best chamber. If any company comes, we can make it up off from our beds!" said John. "I can send a blanket or two off from my bed, I know; — can't but just turn over in it, so many clothes on, now."

"Aunt Hitty, take a blanket off from our bed," said Grace and Dicky, at once.

"Well, well, we 'll see," said Aunt Hitty, bustling up.

Up rose grandmamma, with great earnestness, now, and going into the next room, and opening a large cedar wood-chest, returned, bearing in her arms two large snow-white blankets, which she deposited flat on the table, just as Aunt Hitty was whisking off the table-cloth.

"Mortal! mother, what are you going to do?" said Aunt Hitty.

"There," she said, "I spun those, every thread of 'em, when my name was Mary Evans. Those were my wedding blankets, made of real nice wool, and worked with roses in all the corners. I 've got *them* to give!" and grandmamma stroked and smoothed the blankets, and patted them down, with great pride and tenderness. It was evident she was giving something that lay very near her heart; but she never faltered.

"La! mother, there 's no need of that," said Aunt Hitty. "Use them on your own bed, and send the blankets off from that; — they are just as good for the soldiers."

"No, I shan't!" said the old lady, waxing warm; "'t an't a bit too good for 'em. I 'll send the very best I 've got, before they shall suffer. Send 'em the *best!*" and the old lady gestured oratorically!

They were interrupted by a rap at the door, and two men entered, and announced themselves as commissioned by Congress to search out supplies for the army. Now the plot thickens. Aunt

Hitty flew in every direction, — through entry-passage, meal-room, milk-room, down cellar, up chamber, — her cap-border on end with patriotic zeal; and followed by John, Dick and Gracie, who eagerly bore to the kitchen the supplies that she turned out, while Mrs. Ward busied herself in quietly sorting, bundling, and arranging in the best possible travelling order, the various contributions that were precipitately launched on the kitchen floor.

Aunt Hitty soon appeared in the kitchen with an armful of stockings, which, kneeling on the floor, she began counting and laying out.

"There," she said, laying down a large bundle on some blankets, "that leaves just two pair apiece, all round."

"La!" said John, "what's the use of saving two pair for me? I can do with one pair, as well as father."

"Sure enough," said his mother; "besides, I can knit you another pair in a day."

"And I can do with one pair," said Dicky.

"Yours will be too small, young master, I guess," said one of the commissioners.

"No," said Dicky; "I've got a pretty good foot of my own, and Aunt Hitty will always knit my stockings an inch too long, 'cause she says I grow so. See here, — these will do;" and the boy shook his, triumphantly.

"And mine, too," said Gracie, nothing doubting, having been busy all the time in pulling off her little stockings.

"Here," she said to the man who was packing the things into a wide-mouthed sack; "here's mine," and her large blue eyes looked earnestly through her tears.

Aunt Hitty flew at her. — "Good land! the child's crazy! Don't think the men could wear your stockings, — take 'em away!"

Gracie looked around with an air of utter desolation, and began to cry. "I wanted to give them something," said she. "I'd rather go barefoot on the snow all day, than not send 'em anything."

"Give me the stockings, my child," said the old soldier, tenderly. "There, I'll take 'em, and show 'em to the soldiers, and tell them what the little girl said that sent them, and it will do them as much good as if they could wear them. They've got little girls at home, too." Gracie fell on her mother's bosom completely happy, and Aunt Hitty only muttered,

"Everybody does spile that child; and no wonder, neither!"

Soon the old sleigh drove off from the brown house, tightly

packed and heavily loaded. And Gracie and Dicky were creeping up to their little beds.

"There 's been something put on the altar of Liberty to-night, has n't there, Dick?"

"Yes, indeed," said Dick; and, looking up to his mother, he said, "But, mother, what did you give?"

"I?" said the mother, musingly.

"Yes, you, mother; what have you given to the country?"

"All that I have, dears," said she, laying her hands gently on their heads, — "my husband and my children!"

II. — THE ALTAR OF ——, OR 1850.

The setting sun of chill December lighted up the solitary front window of a small tenement on —— street, which we now have occasion to visit. As we push gently aside the open door, we gain sight of a small room, clean as busy hands can make it, where a neat, cheerful young mulatto woman is busy at an ironing-table. A basket full of glossy-bosomed shirts, and faultless collars and wrist-bands, is beside her, into which she is placing the last few items with evident pride and satisfaction. A bright, black-eyed boy, just come in from school, with his satchel of books over his shoulder, stands, cap in hand, relating to his mother how he has been at the head of his class, and showing his school-tickets, which his mother, with untiring admiration, deposits in the little real china tea-pot, — which, as being their most reliable article of gentility, is made the deposit of all the money and most especial valuables of the family.

"Now, Henry," says the mother, "look out and see if father is coming along the street;" and she begins filling the little black tea-kettle, which is soon set singing on the stove.

From the inner room now daughter Mary, a well-grown girl of thirteen, brings the baby, just roused from a nap, and very impatient to renew his acquaintance with his mamma.

"Bless his bright eyes! — mother will take him," ejaculates the busy little woman, whose hands are by this time in a very floury condition, in the incipient stages of wetting up biscuit, — "in a minute;" and she quickly frees herself from the flour and paste, and, deputing Mary to roll out her biscuit, proceeds to the consolation and succor of young master.

"Now, Henry," says the mother, "you 'll have time, before supper, to take that basket of clothes up to Mr. Sheldin's; — put in that

nice bill, that you made out last night. I shall give you a cent for every bill you write out for me. What a comfort it is, now, for one's children to be gettin' learnin' so!"

Henry shouldered the basket, and passed out the door, just as a neatly-dressed colored man walked up, with his pail and white-wash brushes.

"O, you 've come, father, have you? — Mary, are the biscuits in? — you may as well set the table, now. Well, George, what 's the news?"

"Nothing, only a pretty smart day's work. I 've brought home five dollars, and shall have as much as I can do, these two weeks;" and the man, having washed his hands, proceeded to count out his change on the ironing-table.

"Well, it takes you to bring in the money," said the delighted wife; "nobody but you could turn off that much in a day!"

"Well, they do say — those that 's had me once — that they never want any other hand to take hold in their rooms. I s'pose its a kinder practice I 've got, and kinder natural!"

"Tell ye what," said the little woman, taking down the family strong box, — to wit, the china tea-pot, aforenamed, — and pouring the contents on the table, "we 're getting mighty rich, now! We can afford to get Henry his new Sunday-cap, and Mary her muslin-de-laine dress; — take care, baby, you rogue!" she hastily interposed, as young master made a dive at a dollar bill, for his share in the proceeds.

"He wants something, too, I suppose," said the father; "let him get his hand in while he 's young."

The baby gazed, with round, astonished eyes, while mother, with some difficulty, rescued the bill from his grasp; but, before any one could at all anticipate his purpose, he dashed in among the small change with such zeal as to send it flying all over the table.

"Hurra! — Bub 's a smasher!" said the father, delighted; "he 'll make it fly, he thinks;" and, taking the baby on his knee, he laughed merrily, as Mary and her mother pursued the rolling coin all over the room.

"He knows now, as well as can be, that he 's been doing mischief," said the delighted mother, as the baby kicked and crowed uproariously; — "he 's such a forward child, now, to be only six months old! — O, you 've no idea, father, how mischievous he grows," and therewith the little woman began to roll and tumble the little mischief-maker about, uttering divers frightful threats,

which appeared to contribute, in no small degree, to the general hilarity.

"Come, come, Mary," said the mother, at last, with a sudden burst of recollection; "you must n't be always on your knees fooling with this child! — Look in the oven at them biscuits."

"They 're done exactly, mother, — just the brown!" — and, with the word, the mother dumped baby on to his father's knee, where he sat contentedly munching a very ancient crust of bread, occasionally improving the flavor thereof by rubbing it on his father's coat-sleeve.

"What have you got in that blue dish, there?" said George, when the whole little circle were seated around the table.

"Well, now, what *do* you suppose?" said the little woman, delighted; — "a quart of nice oysters, — just for a treat, you know. I would n't tell you till this minute," said she, raising the cover.

"Well," said George, "we both work hard for our money, and we don't owe anybody a cent; and why should n't we have our treats, now and then, as well as rich folks?"

And gayly passed the supper hour; the tea-kettle sung, the baby crowed, and all chatted and laughed abundantly.

"I 'll tell you," said George, wiping his mouth, "wife, these times are quite another thing from what it used to be down in Georgia. I remember then old Mas'r used to hire me out by the year; and one time, I remember, I came and paid him in two hundred dollars, — every cent I 'd taken. He just looked it over, counted it, and put it in his pocket-book, and said, 'You are a good boy, George,' — and he gave me *half-a-dollar!*"

"I want to know, now!" said his wife.

"Yes, he did, and that was every cent I ever got of it; and, I tell you, I was mighty bad off for clothes, them times."

"Well, well, the Lord be praised, they 're over, and you are in a free country now!" said the wife, as she rose thoughtfully from the table, and brought her husband the great Bible. The little circle were ranged around the stove for evening prayers.

"Henry, my boy, you must read, — you are a better reader than your father, — thank God, that let you learn early!"

The boy, with a cheerful readiness, read, "The Lord is my shepherd," and the mother gently stilled the noisy baby, to listen to the holy words. Then all kneeled, while the father, with simple earnestness, poured out his soul to God.

They had but just risen, — the words of Christian hope and trust scarce died on their lips, — when lo! the door was burst open, and

two men entered; and one of them, advancing, laid his hand on the father's shoulder. "This is the fellow," said he.

"You are arrested in the name of the United States!" said the other.

"Gentlemen, what is this?" said the poor man, trembling.

"Are you not the property of *Mr. B.*, of Georgia?" said the officer.

"Gentlemen, I 've been a free, hard-working man, these ten years."

"Yes, but you are arrested, on suit of Mr. B., as his slave."

Shall we describe the leave-taking? — the sorrowing wife, the dismayed children, the tears, the anguish, — that simple, honest, kindly home, in a moment so desolated! Ah, ye who defend this because it is law, think, for one hour, what if this that happens to your poor brother should happen to you! * * * * *

It was a crowded court-room, and the man stood there to be tried — for life? — no; but for the life of life — for liberty!

Lawyers hurried to and fro, buzzing, consulting, bringing authorities, — all anxious, zealous, engaged, — for what? — to save a fellow-man from bondage? — no: anxious and zealous lest he might escape, — full of zeal to deliver him over to slavery. The poor man's anxious eyes follow vainly the busy course of affairs, from which he dimly learns that he is to be sacrificed — on the altar of the Union; and that his heart-break and anguish, and the tears of his wife, and the desolation of his children, are, in the eyes of these well-informed men, only the bleat of a sacrifice, bound to the horns of the glorious American altar! * * * *

Again it is a bright day, and business walks brisk in this market. Senator and statesman, the learned and patriotic, are out, this day, to give their countenance to an edifying and impressive, and truly American spectacle, — the sale of a man! All the preliminaries of the scene are there: dusky-browed mothers, looking with sad eyes while speculators are turning round their children, — looking at their teeth, and feeling of their arms; a poor, old, trembling woman, helpless, half-blind, whose last child is to be sold, holds on to her bright boy with trembling hands. Husbands and wives, sisters and friends, all soon to be scattered like the chaff of the threshing-floor, look sadly on each other with poor nature's last tears; and among them walk briskly glib, oily politicians, and thriving men of law, letters and religion, exceedingly sprightly and in good spirits,— for why? — it is n't *they* that are going to be sold; it 's only somebody else. And so they are very comfortable, and look

on the whole thing as quite a matter-of-course affair; and, as it is to be conducted to-day, a decidedly valuable and judicious exhibition.

And now, after so many hearts and souls have been knocked and thumped this way and that way by the auctioneer's hammer, comes the *instructive* part of the whole; and the husband and father, whom we saw in his simple home, reading and praying with his children, and rejoicing, in the joy of his poor ignorant heart, that he lived in a free country, is now set up to be admonished of his mistake.

Now there is great excitement, and pressing to see, and exultation and approbation; for it is important and interesting to see a man put down that has tried to be a *free man.*

"That 's he, is it? — Could n't come it, could he?" says one.

"No, and he will never come it, that 's more," says another, triumphantly.

"I don't generally take much interest in scenes of this nature," says a grave representative; — "but I came here to-day for the sake of the *principle!*"

"Gentlemen," says the auctioneer, "we 've got a specimen here that some of your northern abolitionists would give any price for; but they shan't have him! — no! we 've looked out for that. The man that buys him must give bonds never to sell him to go north again!"

"Go it!" shout the crowd, "good! — good! — hurra!" "An impressive idea!" says a senator; "a noble maintaining of principle!" and the man is bid off, and the hammer falls with a last crash on his hearth, and hopes, and manhood, and he lies a bleeding wreck on the altar of Liberty!

Such was the altar in 1776; — such is the altar in 1850!